

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Fort Missoula Regional Park Interpretive Loop Trail

Type of Project: Research
Discipline: Interdisciplinary
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: College of Technology, University of Montana
Effective Dates: 6/18/2012 - 4/1/2013
Funding Amount: \$15,000

Investigators and Agency Representative:

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Project Abstract: Fort Missoula Regional Park has been designated by the Department of the Interior as one of Montana's two America's Great Outdoors projects. National Park Service staff from the RTCA Office in Bozeman, Montana were assigned as the project's DOI Quarterback, and have been working closely with the City of Missoula and numerous other partners since the Fall of 2011. The proposed regional park will provide the community with facilities for outdoor sporting events, create a cultural-heritage center, preserve open views and wildlife habitat, enhance wetlands and riparian vegetation, and serve as an environmental education center for youth activity outdoors on 246-acres of public parkland at Fort Missoula. Three miles of trails, over 100 acres of natural area, fishing ponds, access to the Bitterroot River, and connectivity to Missoula's public transportation system will all attract tourists to the area and bolster the local economy.

The Fort Missoula Regional Park project enjoys the support of many stakeholder groups, elected officials and the community at large. A primary reason for this broad support is the diversity of benefits packaged into the project, including: the health/physical activity and economic benefits of a regional team sports facility; environmental protection and restoration; a high-quality environmental education venue for youth; preservation and interpretation of a rich historical landscape, including the historic location of a regional center of operations for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); employment opportunities for youth; transit and safe/accessible non-motorized connections with the nearby hospital, public schools, and broader community.

Proponents have been planning and working on this project since the 1990s. A master plan for the park was adopted by the Missoula City Council in 2002. The first phase of the project has been designed to the 35% level and will cost in excess of \$20 million. Later phases will require additional resources. The project is now positioned to move forward with implementation. A 1/2 mile interpretive trail loop and site improvements to a 26-acre focus area within the regional park will be constructed during the summer of 2012. The 8' gravel trail will be roughed in by heavy equipment, then finished by hand. Site improvements will include construction of a trailhead with gravel parking area, removal of non-native vegetation, planting of native species, fence installation, and construction of 10 CCC-era picnic tables and a 2-sided kiosk with interpretive panels using "sinker logs" recovered from the Blackfoot River, as part of the Milltown superfund site restoration. Montana Conservation Corps labor will be used to finish the trail and to construct the CCC-era log tables and interpretive kiosk.

Construction will conclude on National Public Lands Day, September 29 2012, with a dedication event which will also serve as a kickoff celebration for the larger regional park project and the America's Great Outdoors initiative. An educational element will teach participants about trail construction, CCC-era history and construction techniques, and AGO goals and initiatives. Attendees from two conferences that conclude on NPLD - the CCC Alumni Reunion and the MT/ID Recreation and Parks Association - will join community volunteers at the event. As one of Montana's two AGO projects, the Secretary of the Interior will be invited to attend the celebration.

Under this agreement, the University of Montana's College of Technology will purchase materials including gravel and fencing and pay for other direct project costs, including work by the Conservation crew. The project product will be successful completion of materials purchase, and a brief letter report on activities carried out under this agreement.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: The letter report is due no later than 12/1/2012.

Keywords: Fort Missoula Regional Park, interpretive loop trail, **construction**, Montana Conservation Corps, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), Intermountain Region, University of Montana's College of Technology